Charles Dowsett

"THE MADMAN HAS COME BACK AGAIN!" BYRON AND ARMENIAN

In Commemoration of the 200th Anniversary of Lord Byron's Birth

According to one report, for which, however, there is no firm documentary evidence—though it does not altogether lack a ring of truth—when the youthful Lord Byron returned on the morrow of his first visit at the end of 1816 to the Mekhitarist monastery of the Padri Armeni on the Isola San Lazzaro in the Venetian Lagoon, eager to begin his announced study of the Armenian language, Father Harut'iwn Awgerian, the learned Armenian who was to become his principal mentor, and fairly quickly his admirer, turned to his fellow monks with the regrettably immortal remark: "The madman has come back again!"

The Armenian father would not have been alone in this lightning assessment of Byron's character, and many of the poet's fellow countrymen would have chimed in: "Mad—and bad!" They would have been wrong on both counts, but in this essay, allowing the sane and good among his contemporaries to rest in peace, and obscurity, I concern myself with evidence of the learning, intelligence, and industry in which his genius was rooted, within a field of inquiry in which few English poets have shown any interest. One says "few," because Chaucer, Gower, Marlowe, and Milton knew at least that there was a place called Armenia, and William Watson composed some notable sonnets on behalf of the Armenian subjects of the Red Sultan. But none immersed himself so completely, if only for a brief three or four months, in Armenian culture as Byron.

Nor was any as well prepared for such an adventure.

When, on December, 1816,[1] Byron first set foot on the Isola San Lazzaro, he was ignorant neither of the East in general nor of the Armenians in particular. Greek he had learned at school, and despite the view of his friend (of the Jonsonian ilk) Thomas Moore - one that given the latter's own expert translations from the *Greek Anthology* must be treated with respect - that Byron's knowledge of Classical

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Greek was not of the most brilliant, what passed for middling in 1800 would no doubt be very welcome at Oxford in 1988, though the young Harrovian, at the age of eighteen, had had no wish to vie with the youth

> Who scarcely skill'd an English line to pen,
> Scans Attic metre with a critic's ken.[2]

In 1810 Byron could write to Henry Dury, "I speak the Romaic, or Modern Greek, tolerably," note that the contemporary Greeks "of verse, except in rhyme have no idea" (that is, of quantitative meter), and in 1811 publish "Translation of the Romaic Song *Benô mes to periboli,* / Hôraiotatê Xaêdê (I enter thy garden of roses, / Beloved and fair Haidée). In the same letter to Dury, written on his Grand Tour, which took in Athens, Smyrna, Ephesus, and Constantinople, he reported: "I can swear in Turkish . . . but I have got no great vocabulary in that language," although the evidence of his *Oriental Tales* suggests that he acquired a more extensive vocabulary later on, as well as a deep knowledge of things Oriental. As early as 1811 he quotes Sir William Jones's translation from Ḥâfiz, and his *Oriental Tales* display a familiarity with the Near East unrivaled at the time by any Western poet with the possible exception of his friend Thomas Moore, whose *Lalla Rookh,* however, was not published until 1817. Among his *Occasional Pieces* there is an adaption from a Turkish poem, "The Chain I gave," composed ca. 1812, and in 1813, the year that *The Giaour* was published, he writes to his future wife Anne Isabella Milbanke to the effect that "I can't empty my head of the East." *The Giaour* shows him well versed in the principal themes of Eastern love poetry, such as the love of the Nightingale for the Rose, so well known to Armenians from the songs of Sayat'-Nova:

> How welcome is each gentle air
> That wakes and wafts the odours there!
> For there the Rose, o'er crag or vale,
> Sultana of the Nightingale,
> The maid for whom his melody,
> His thousand songs are heard on high,
> Blooms blushing to her lover's tale,
> His queen, the garden queen, his Rose. . . .
>
> (*The Giaour,* ll. 19-26)

Byron's works and his letters show him to have been a meticulous observer of the life and customs of the peoples he visited on his Eastern travels. His *Oriental Tales,* apart from a vocabulary abound-

ing in words like *ataghan, goul, afrit, kiosk, caloyer,* contains many striking vignettes of Eastern life:

> A turban carved in coarsest stone,
> A pillar with rank weeds o'ergrown,
> Wherein can now be scarcely read
> The Koran verse that mourns the dead,
> Point out the spot where Hassan fell. . . .
>
> (*The Giaour*, ll. 723 ff.)

The poet's observations were supported by extensive reading. We know from a list of books drawn up by Byron as a twelve-year-old schoolboy that he had already read two works on the history of the Ottoman Empire. One important work on Ottoman society that he had at his disposal by 1813, the year *The Giaour* was published, was Castellan's *Moeurs, usages, costumes des Othomans et abrégé de leur histoire ... avec des éclaircissements tirés d'ouvrages et communiquès par M. Langlès,* 6 volumes, 72 plates (Paris, 1812), with pages of ample material for a multitude of Byronesque Oriental tales.[3] The colored frontispiece to Volume II depicts an Oriental scene of violence upon unfaithful womanhood that could not have escaped the attention of the author of *The Bride of Abydos.* The picture, entitled "La malheureuse Sulthana offrit en vain à celui qui l'avait découverte un mouchoir rempli de sequins," represents the Sultana Kieuzel (Güzel) who had plotted to depose her husband Mahomet IV (1648-1687) in favor of his younger brother Soleiman with the aid of the agha of the Janissaries, but was thwarted by the vizier Synan Pasha, captured by a royal falconer, and strangled by the *itch-oghlans* (pages). One may ask oneself whether Byron's lines

> The foremost Tartar's in the gap,
> Conspicuous by his yellow cap
>
> (*The Giaour*, 11. 549 f.)

owe anything to the illustration in Castellan (vol. 6, fac. p. 11), which depicts a yellow Turkish cap, insofar, of course, as one can trust the consistency of hand coloring. Is it only coincidence, based on each man's personal experience, that Castellan depicts the Turks as "graves par inclination et par habitude" in line with their "apathie complète de corps et d'esprit" (ibid., p. 204), while Byron, knowing the Turks as most do, finds that "the face of the Mussulman not oft betrays to standers-by the mind within," or that Castellan depicts the Greeks as "naturellement gais et bruyants," surrendering themselves

on public holidays to "toute l'intempérance de la joie, et [qui] passent rapidement de l'oppression au bonheur, de l'humiliation à l'insolence" (ibid., p. 221), while Byron notes that, whereas "Unmoved the Moslem sits, the light Greek carols by"?

What prompted Byron to visit San Lazzaro in the first place? Anyone familiar with vaporetti timetables knows that even today one is unlikely to arrive there by chance. One has to make up one's mind to take the trouble to go there, and in Byron's day that meant hiring a private gondola. With its tall, elegant, onion-domed tower rising like a white minaret from a cluster of cedars, palm, and olive trees, the tiny island of the Padri Armeni tugs at the heart of any man sensitive to the call of the East, and that, added to Byron's overwhelming interest in the Orient, may have been sufficient to compel him to persuade his friend Hobhouse that they hire a boat and pay the monastery a visit. But—and nobody seems ever to have remarked upon this before—Byron already knew something about the Armenians. At the very least he might have read about them in the pages of Castellan, which read in translation as follows:

> Orientals give the inhabitants of Armenia (Arminiyeh) the name of Armen and Armeny. This is the same people whom the Greeks and Romans called Parthians [!] . . . The Armenians, for many centuries oppressed beneath a foreign yoke, escape tyranny by emigrating to the neighboring countries. They form about the twelfth part of the population of Constantinople. Nearly all of them merchants, some have immense businesses, with stores and correspondents in all parts of Asia. They are praised for their uprightness, their prudence, their skill in commercial speculation, their continuous zeal and indefatigability at work, a basic natural goodness which binds them to strangers and prevents any quarreling among themselves, as long as personal interest is not involved. The faults with which one reproaches them are those of pretty well all nations: they love good food and wine, and money above all else; but one must say to their credit that there is no people more susceptible to religious feeling and more constant in following the practices of Christianity. Their churches are the best decorated in the whole of the Orient. There are no nobles among the Armenians. They all learn a craft in their youth, and cease to practice it when they begin to trade, or when they have earned enough to keep their family. One observes also many Armenians engaged on the land, in agriculture and viticulture. Their wives are as closely guarded as those of the Turks: they never leave the house unless covered in their out-door cloak (*ferâdjeh*) and a veil (*maḥramah*) which leaves only their eyes visible. One even says that, in the quarter reserved for the Armenians, neighboring houses have communicating doors through which wives may visit each other and entertain without being obliged to go out onto the street; but these doors, most unlike those of Janus, open when the ladies are at peace, and shut at the slightest dispute (ibid., p. 94).

It is probable that Byron had read these words of Castellan, available to him three years before he visited San Lazzaro. But a poet's imagination has a history every bit as important as that of his intellect, though it is rarely accessible to his critics. On this occasion we

are lucky, however, for we know that Byron had heard tell of the Armenians, and in connection with Venice, at a much earlier and very formative stage in his development. Childhood, as Freud & Co., hobbling after Wordsworth ("the child is father of the man"), have underlined, is the time of life when impressions on the psyche are most profound and indelible, and one of the books that had a deep effect on the young Byron, by his own testimony, was Schiller's *Der Geisterseher*, translated into English under the title of *The Armenian, or the Ghost Seer*, by W. Render in London, 1800, when the poet was twelve years old.[4]

In a letter to John Murray dated April 2, 1817, Byron describes his impressions of Venice in connection with his verse drama *Marino Faliero, Doge of Venice*, mentioning among the things that caught his imagination "Schiller's *Armenian*, a novel which took a great hold of me when a boy. It is also called the *Ghost Seer*, and I never walked down St. Mark's by moonlight without thinking of it: 'and at nine o'clock he died.'"

The scene to which Byron alludes reads as follows:

> As it grew late and the people were dispersing, the Prince observed that a mask followed us everywhere. The mask was an Armenian, and walked alone. . . . We sat down on a stone bench and waited for the mask to pass by. It came straight up to us, and sat down next to the Prince. The Prince took out a watch and said to me, in a loud voice, in French, rising to his feet at the same time: "It is past nine o'clock. Come, we are forgetting that people are waiting for us at the Louvre." *This he said to throw the mask off* our track. "Nine o'clock," said the mask, in the same language, slowly and deliberately. "*Wish yourself good fortune, Prince (naming him* by *his true name*). At nine o'clock he died." Then the mask rose to his feet, and left us.

The Armenian, appearing in the guise of a Russian officer, is thus described: "The physiognomy of this last had something so remarkable about it that it attracted our attention. Never in my life did I see so many traits, and so little character; so much inviting benevolence, and such forbidding coldness painted together in one man's countenance. Every passion seemed to have formerly dwelt there, and to have abandoned it." An associate of his describes him thus: "No sword can wound, no poison hurt, no fire burn him—no vessel in which he embarks can be shipwrecked or sunk; time itself seems to have no influence over him; years do not affect his constitution, nor age whiten his hair. He was never seen to take any food. Never did he approach a woman. No sleep closes his eyes. . . . When the clock strikes twelve, he ceases to belong to the living."

Anyone attempting to match up his own Armenian acquaintances with the above description should be aware that the Ghost Seer is not an Armenian at all (and Boileau compounds confusion by rendering

Schiller's *Armenier* as "Arminian," a not unknown error, but in the circumstances, a particularly crass one): this is but one of the melodramatic personage's disguises. As the same associate relates, in his cell in *I Piombi*, "he is not what he appears to be. There are few conditions or countries in which he has not worn the mask. No person knows who he is, whence he comes, or whither he goes. Some say that he has been for a long time in Egypt, and that he has brought from thence, out of a catacomb, his occult sciences. Here we only know him by the name of The Incomprehensible." It is believed by reliable critics that Schiller intended herewith to expose the sect of the so-called Illuminati which had begun to spread to Germany. But real Armenian or not, it was as an Armenian that this mysterious figment of Schiller's overheated imagination continued its hold upon Byron, and still colored his view of Venice some seventeen years later. The Prince in the book feels that "an unknown power pursues me, an all-powerful being hovers over me; an invisible agency which I cannot flee from, watches over all my actions. I must seek the Armenian, and obtain an explanation from him." Byron was in a like predicament. There must be people today who, on visits to Bavaria or Romania, half expect to be confronted by Frankenstein's monster, or by Count Dracula. The wife of Byron's contemporary Shelley has a lot to answer for. Venice for Byron was haunted by a menacing ghost arising from his childhood reading. And yet, as he continues in his letter to Murray mentioning Schiller's work, "I hate things *all fiction*. . . . There should always be some foundation of fact for the most airy fiction, and pure invention is but the talent of a liar." It would seem but natural, therefore, that the adult poet would seize an opportunity to seek out the truth that might lie behind the "airy fiction." In 1816 one presented itself. A letter of January 2, 1817, says: "At this period I was much struck—in common, I believe, with every other traveller— with the Society of the Convent of San Lazzaro." That seems to present his visit to San Lazzaro as a normal tourist pursuit, as no doubt for some it was. But Byron was not like any other traveler. He now had an opportunity to confront Schiller's haunting creation with a reality that now lay within his grasp.

Apart from the possible role of Schiller's "Armenian," there is nothing particularly strange in Byron's interest in the Armenians—at least none that an English Armenologist can be expected to see. As for poets undertaking the study of Oriental tongues, had not Goethe already studied Arabic and Persian in preparation for his *Westöstlicher Diwan*? But a romantic poet cannot complain if others romanticize his life still further, though he may object to the way they fall victim to naive bewilderment with more speed and thoroughness

than he himself. Consider, for example, how the Russian writer Yurij Veselovski describes Byron's arrival on the Isola San Lazzaro in his *Literary Sketches:*[5]

> The luxurious southern sun brightly illumines the blue expanse of the Venetian lagoon. In its blinding light the azure waters appear even more beautiful, still more splendid and luxurious the buildings behind them, those of the "Queen of the Adriatic shore," Venice. Along the lagoon glide numerous gondolas; sometimes a large merchant vessel cuts through the surface of the waves bound for the open sea to distant foreign ports. On one of the gondolas which has just set out from the Riva degli Schiavoni one may distinguish the figure of a young man of some twenty-five years of age. His handsome, inspired face, with its intelligent and expressive eyes and a highly capricious stamp on all its features, with dark, curly hair, and finally, a nonchalantly graceful pose—all this attracted the involuntary attention of all those who encountered his gondola. This mysterious stranger, a young man, but judging from the expression on his face, already somewhat weary of life, whose gaze, contemplative and melancholy, wandered over his surroundings was—Byron.

According to this early practitioner of the Hollywood-style travelogue, when Byron explained to the good fathers of San Lazzaro his intention to learn Armenian from them, "the monks joyfully acquiesced in this proposal." There is some indication, however, that the immediate effect of Byron's proposal may not have been what Veselovski imagines, because, as mentioned above, one report has it that when the English lord came back the next day to begin his lessons, Father Awgerian (Aucher) commented upon this surprising consistency with the words, *Khent'ĕ norēn egaw,* "The madman has come back again!" Dashtents', who reports this statement in his *Byron and the Armenians,*[6] explains this phrase as "an indication of flattery and affection in the mouth of Armenians,[7] evoked by the spectacle of the agility and enthusiasm with which the poet leaped from his gondola onto the island. It is true that *khent* when used by Raffi, like *Idiot* when used by Dostoevski, has an undertone of approval, as of one whose madness, or unusual behavior, is the result of a higher moral logic. But it would need a lot of special pleading to explain it away in the present context. Mad is mad, and Byron was far from that.

The story of Awgerian's "madman" remark, however, is based upon oral tradition, and may be yet another myth and legend in the field of Armenian Studies in which only the folklorist can rejoice. At any rate, by the time the father came to write his Journal (*Ink'napatum ōragrut'iwn*), exactly when is not known, he made no mention of this possible first impression. On the contrary, perhaps with much hindsight, and homework, he has nothing but admiration for his future pupil: "On December 1," he writes, "the renowned and world-famous English poet, Lord Byron, whose writings are worth their weight in gold, came on a visit to our monastery.... He is a lively

young man, with a happy disposition and fiery eyes [this is the nearest this account comes to *khent'*]; although lame in one foot, he was of handsome appearance."[8] Perhaps with his reference to "writings worth their weight in gold," which posterity has shown to be an underestimate, the good father attempted to make amends for an incautious premature judgment (certainly it smacks of the "doth protest too much"). It was on the day after his first visit, according to Awgerian, that Byron "asked that he should teach him Armenian, and also that he might take up residence in the monastery." The second request was speedily refused by the Abbot, Step'anos Agonts', on the grounds that "none of the monks knew him at the time," and one must say that, Byron having already begun his liaison with Marianna Segati, the wife of his landlord, a hatter, in the Frezzeria (whose shop, Il Tricorno, soon became known among the *concittadini* of Goldoni as Il Tricornuto), closer acquaintance would hardly have inclined the Abbot to take a different decision, although permission for Byron to reside on the island might have augmented the Abbot's pastoral success in reducing the frequency at least of the poet's *peccati.* But the Abbot himself was soon captivated by Byron's spell. In a letter dated December 9, 1816, addressed to Father Minas in Constantinople,[9] he writes:

> An Englishman called Lord Birën, a young man of about twenty-four, of cultivated mind (*mtavarzh*), even studious (*usumnaser̄*), of the University of Oxford,[10] a famous poet among them, and with a knowledge of various Oriental languages, has come to our monastery and looked at the Armenian language, for which every day at two in the afternoon he comes to the monastery with his servants, and under the supervision of our Father Harut'iwn he studies Armenian, for which he shows great aptitude. He intends to pass the winter here. At present (Father Harut'iwn Awgerian) gives him some principal passages from the *Life of Alexander* in Armenian, above all those not found in Curtius, to read in Armenian and translate into English. He is now the main person to encourage its publication; he manifests also a wish to publish the *Chronicle* (of Eusebius) into English.

Through his Letters, we know much about Byron's mind at the time. Although not "mad," his mind was far from settled in 1816, a year in which his wife had left him after the birth of his daughter, in which he had taken to drink and was in financial difficulties, in which scandal concerning his suspected affair with his half sister Augusta, coupled with the unpopularity of his political opinions (he rejoiced at Napoleon's escape from Elba and mourned his defeat at Waterloo), had made life so intolerable for him in his native land that he left England to go into a voluntary exile from which he never returned. On September 23, in Switzerland, he recorded how he had "passed whole woods of withered pines . . . done in a single winter—their appearance

reminds me of me and my family." It was the winter of his discontent, a dead season for the poet in him. On January 2, 1817 he writes to Murray: "I have not done a stitch of poetry since I left Switzerland, and have not, at present, the *estro* upon me. I have at present no thoughts of resuming that poem [*Childe Harold*] nor of beginning any other. If I write I think of trying prose; but I dread introducing living people, or applications which might be made to living people; perhaps one day or other, I may attempt some work of fancy in prose, descriptive of Italian manners and of human passions; but at present I am preoccupied." We know what preoccupied him at the time. Byron clearly felt the world crumbling around him: his mundane troubles had clipped the wings of poesy. What he needed was reassurance of his own reality within a physical universe, a sure base. He found it in Armenian. As he put it in a letter to Moore, December 5, 1816: "I found that my mind wanted something craggy to break upon," and it was the study of Armenian that he chose "as the most difficult thing I could discover here for an amusement . . . to torture me into attention."

It might appear that Byron undertook the study of Armenian as others might take to crosswords, merely on account of the challenge to the intellect. Indeed, it is along such lines that he explains his interest to Augusta in a letter dated December 18, 1816: "If you would ask me my reason for studying this out of the way language—I can only answer that it is Oriental and difficult and employs me—which are—as you know my Eastern and difficult way of thinking—reasons sufficient." For all this, and one must note that the challenge had to be Oriental as well as difficult, his motives for learning Armenian were certainly not exclusively linguistic, for he took a keen interest in what there was to be read in the language. A Balliol man, Mr. Peter Quennell, has referred to the "apparent futility" of studying Armenian, though useful to people of an irritable and nervous humor in that it "imposed discipline";[11] but biographers do not always possess the qualities of mind and spirit of their subjects, and the futility was not apparent to Byron. He relates to Moore (December 5, 1816) that "there are some very curious MSS in the monastery, as well as books; translations also from Greek originals, now lost [one has already noted that the Abbot mentioned the *Chronicle* of Eusebius, one of such works, in connection with Byron's studies], and from Persian and Syriac, etc.; besides works of their own people." Likewise to Murray (letter of December 4, 1816), he writes that he has "gained some singular and not useless information with regard to the literature and customs of that oriental people." In the famous Preface which Byron wrote for Awgerian's Armenian-English Grammar at the request of the author[12] he gives a summary of what he had thitherto learned of Armenia,

without knowing then, of course, that he was ipso facto to extend his knowledge of Armenian attitudes, for it was just this enthusiastic and well-meaning piece that led to his final departure in 1817 from San Lazzaro when the cautious father refused to publish it for fear of the offense it might give to the Turks and Persians.

On his first visit to the monastery, which lasted for two hours, Byron was shown around by the fathers, principally by two of their number particularly interested in literature: Father Harut'iwn Awgerian, otherwise Paschal Aucher,[13] then engaged upon the composition of an English grammar for Armenians, and the future translator, in 1824, of Milton's *Paradise Lost* into Armenian prose; and Father Suk'ias Somalian, future author, in 1829, of a history of Armenian literature in Italian. Byron was shown the library, which included the illuminated gospels of Queen Mlk'ē of A.D. 902, one of the most celebrated and well-discussed examples of Armenian art. On the following day he visited the printing press, and discussed at length topics of Armenian history and literature with Awgerian, showing, as one might expect, a special interest in Armenian poetry. I describe later what form his interest in Armenian literature took. Suffice it for the moment to note that Byron displayed on this occasion an intelligence superior to that of the celebrated seventeenth-century historian of the Ottoman Empire, Sir Paul Rycaut, who, when he failed to make any sensible contact with the Armenians, attributed it to their stupidity, and when he failed to learn anything of Armenian poetry, assumed that they had none. And Byron was not at all content to learn about Armenian culture in Italian, but saw that to come to grips with it at all, he would need to learn the language in which it is expressed. Awgerian volunteered to be his tutor. Byron was not long in discovering that the rocky crags he sought in Armenian were real enough, but he persevered, though not uniformly full of admiration for the saintly inventor of the Armenian alphabet, for he is soon writing to Hobhouse, then in Florence, "I have mastered 30 of the 38 cursed scratches of Mesrob, the maker of alphabets, and some words of one syllable. My lessons are in the Psalms. Father Pasqual is a very attentive preceptor."

Byron was not slow to point out, however, that he was not alone in finding difficulty in learning the Armenian alphabet, for in a letter to Moore of December 5, 1816, he describes how "four years ago the French instituted an Armenian professorship. Twenty pupils presented themselves on Monday morning, full of noble ardour, ingenuous youth, and impregnable industry. They persevered, with a courage worthy of the nation and of universal conquest, till Thursday; when fifteen of the twenty succumbed to the six-and-twentieth letter

of the alphabet. It is, to be sure, a Waterloo of an alphabet. . . ." Byron showed the spirit that won Waterloo, however, for he himself marched on toward victory in a manner of which Wellington would have been proud: "I find the language (which is twin, the literal and the vulgar) difficult, but not invincible (at least I hope not). I shall go on. I found it necessary to twist my mind round some severer study, and this, as being the hardest I could devise here, will be a file for the serpent."

A two-page list of Armenian characters with their approximate values in English, Latin, French, and Modern Greek, drawn up by Byron and Awgerian, is in the possession of John Murray Ltd. It was most likely sent as a specimen of the proposed Armenian grammar for the use of the English mentioned in the poet's letter to Murray of January 2, 1817, quoted below. Byron's contribution was limited to writing the names of the Armenian characters, as dictated to him by Awgerian, in an English transcription, together with a few desperate phonetic descriptions, such as, for է *ē*, "*a* sounded as in English."[14] Byron's curious mind would clearly not allow him to suffer the difficulties of this many-charactered (but phonetically well-adapted) alphabet altogether passively, that is, without inquiring into its origin. Probably accompanying this list of characters was another document in Murray's possession, in Byron's hand and doubtless intended for the same Grammar, outlining the history of the Armenian script. Its implied reference to fourth-century MSS and "a literature and language rich and cultivated before this period" must own much to Awgerian's and many of his compatriots' somewhat self-indulgent traditional views, but otherwise it is a fair description:

> Veramshabuh in his reign, in the fourth century. Mesrob, or Mashtotz, a learned Armenian, invented the Armenian alphabet consisting of 36 letters. Before that period the nation used the Syriac, Persian or Greek character. Mesrob invented the Characters from *Ayp* to *Kh.* In the 12th century the two remaining character(s) O and F (*Օ* – *Ֆ*) were introduced. No MS exists of a date previous to the fourth century and the invention of this alphabet—the reason of this being the sudden disuse and neglect of the foreign alphabets hitherto adopted, and in different subsequent periods many MSS were purposely destroyed by apostates from their religion, as also by the Christians themselves who wished to destroy all records pertaining to paganism. But the Armenians had a literature and a language rich and cultivated before this period. The translation of the Scriptures was made at this time by Mesrob, the patriarch Isaac, and others, the two being the principals. The Armenians call themselves the Haykh nation from the first king of this country so called. An Armenian would say, "I am Haay," that is, an Armenian.

We know from Awgerian's own Journal (*Ink'napatum ōragrut'iwn*) that Byron studied Armenian with him for a total of fifty days, two to three hours at a time; these fifty days, as we can see from Byron's own letters, were spread over December 1816 to February 1817. By way of

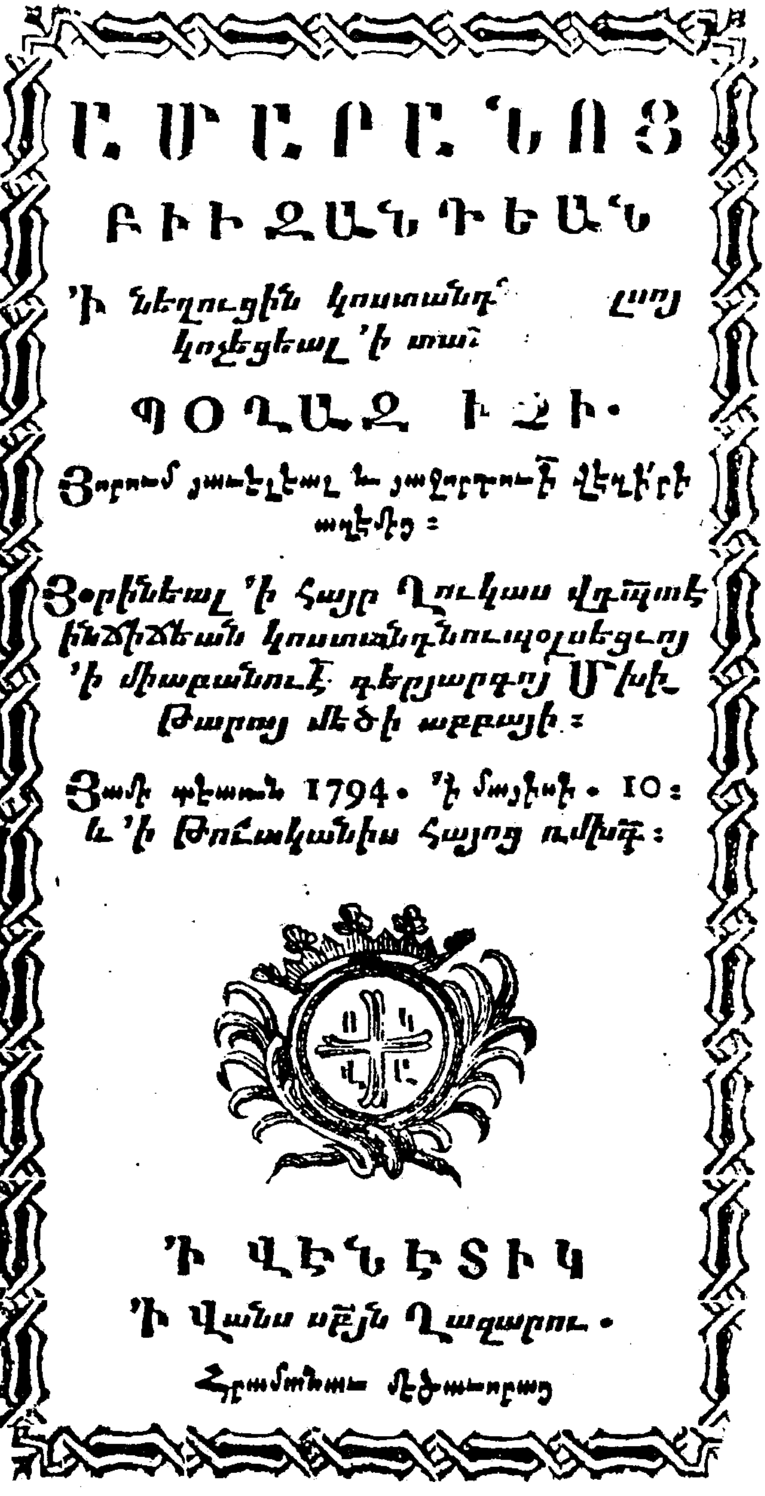

Fig. 1. Title page of Fr. Ghukas Inchichian's poem "Amaranots' Biwzandian"

Fig. 2. First page of "Amaranots' Biwzandian"

Fig. 3. "Byron's Mound" on the Isola San Lazzaro

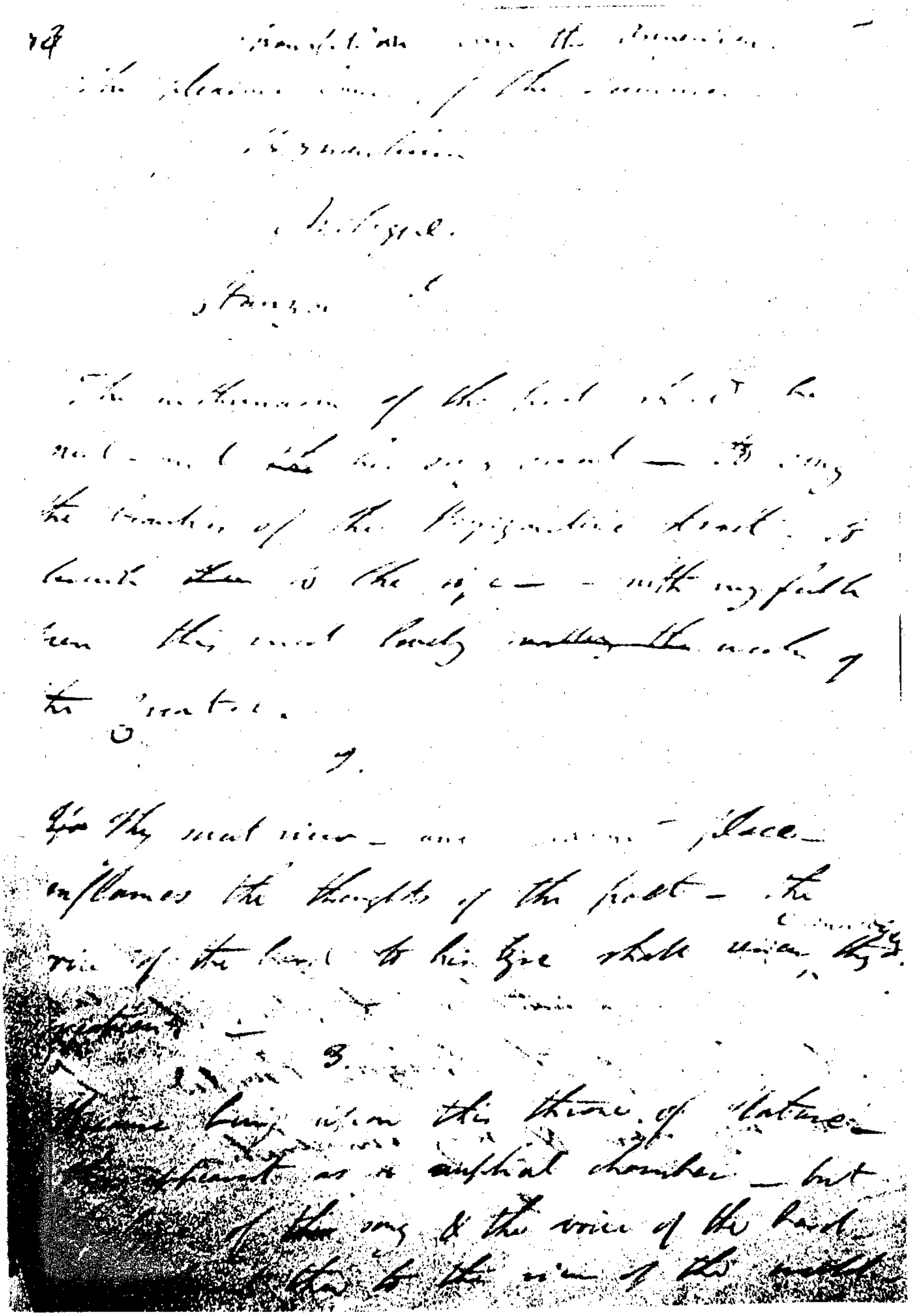

Fig. 4. Byron's handwriting. Opening page of "Translation from the Armenian. The Pleasure Houses of the Summer of Byzantium."

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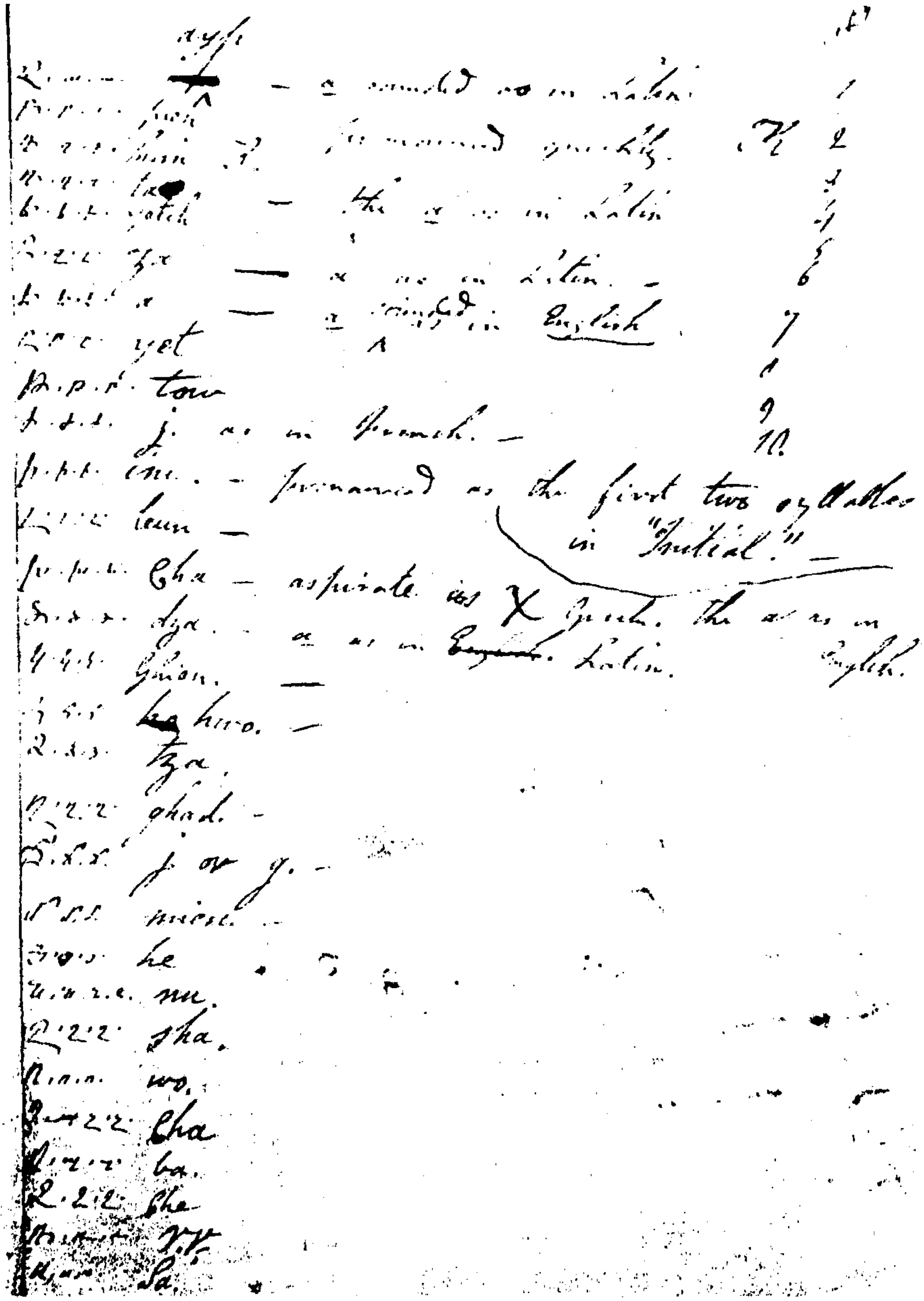

Fig. 5. Byron's handwriting. The Armenian alphabet with phonetic equivalents.

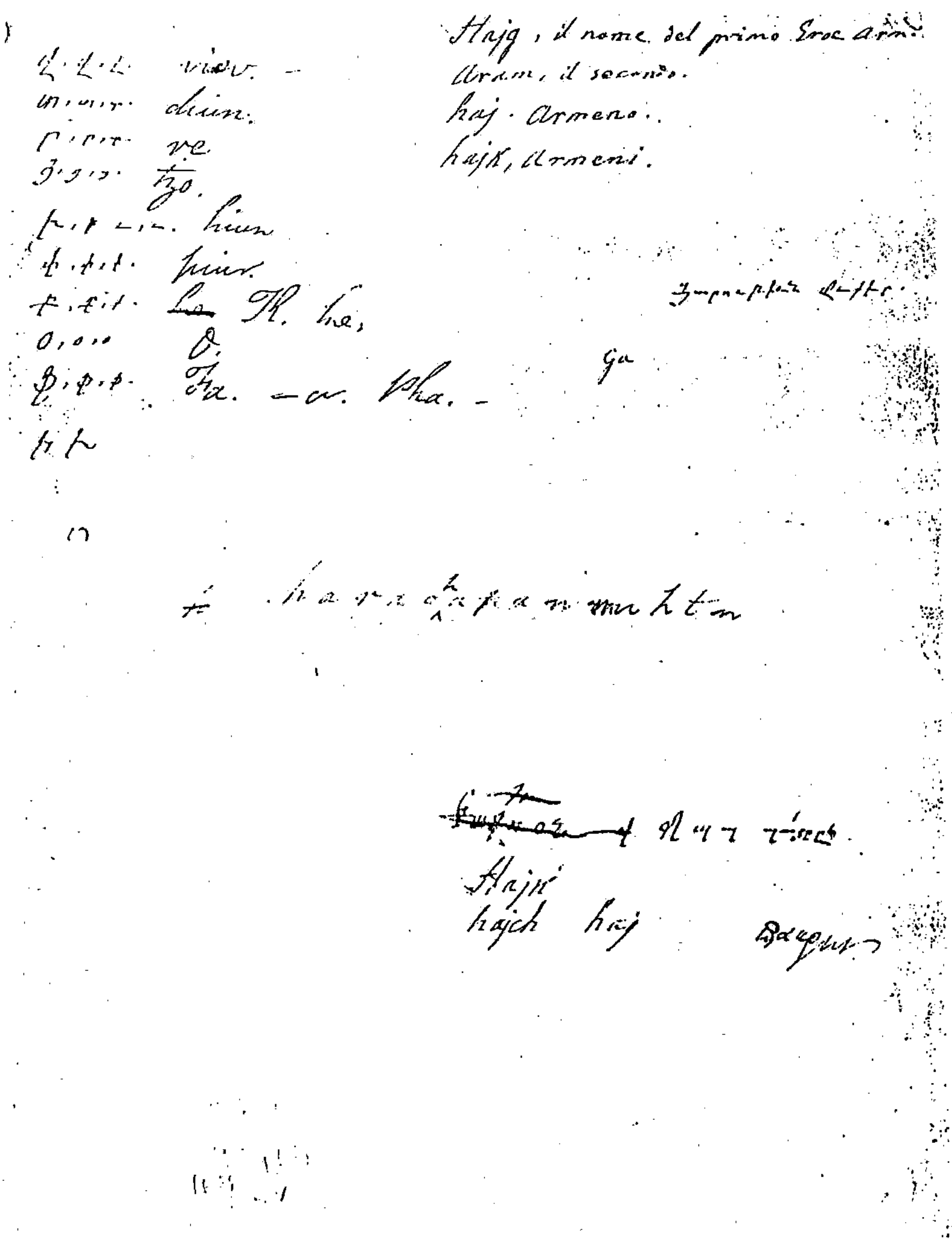
Hajq, il nome del primo Eroe Arm.
Aram, il secondo.
haj. Armeno.
hajk, Armeni.

Fig. 5. Cont.

payment for these lessons, Byron writes to Hobhouse (December 19, 1816), "as I could not offer sordid money to these friars, I have taken upon me the expenses of this [Awgerian's] Armenian and English grammar which is now printing. It costs but a thousand francs to print 500 copies, and being the first published in these joint languages, I think 'I do the state some service.'" This grammar is further referred to in the letter to Murray of January 2, 1817: "In another sheet, I send you some sheets of a grammar, English and Armenian, for the use of the Armenians, of which I promoted, and indeed induced, the publication: (it cost me but a thousand francs—French livres)." John Murray Ltd. still preserve these sheets in their archives, page 17 bearing an inscription in Byron's hand: "This Grammar is for the use of the *Armenians* to acquire English and not for our Nation." In the same letter Byron refers to the other Grammar compiled by Awgerian, published ultimately as *A Grammar: Armenian and English by P. Paschal Aucher and Lord Byron* (first edition 1833):

> Padre Paschal, with some little help from me, as translator of his Italian into English, is also proceeding in an MS Grammar for the *English* acquisition of Armenian, which will be printed also, when finished. We want to know if there are any *Armenian types* or letter-press in England—at Oxford, Cambridge, or elsewhere? You know, I suppose, that, many years ago, the two Whistons published in England an original text of a history of Armenia, with their own Latin translation? Do those types still exist? and where? Pray enquire among your learned acquaintance.

Byron then proceeds to persuade Murray to purchase forty or fifty copies of the second grammar, at a price not exceeding five or ten guineas in all, "and try the curiosity of the learned with a sale of them." Byron's role in the compilation of the Armenian Grammar that bears his name was, by his own account, restricted to that of an interpreter of English from Italian, and it is thus perhaps not the poet's fault that the collision of his mind with the "something craggy" that he sought in Armenian grammar appears in this instance to have had a stunning rather than a stimulating effect on him. Such a sentence as "it is to be remarked that in this declension that the second case is changed in the termination; the third in the termination, and is then denominated the dative-declined-in-the-termination, and sometimes has before it a letter or preposition, and is then called the dative-with-the-preposition" (*A Grammar Armenian and English,* ed. 1873, p. 15), owes more to Father Paschal's would-be clarification of Armenian grammar than to any deficiencies in Byron's prose style. However, few sparks of poetic fire were thrown off when the metal of Byron's mind met these flinty crags of Armenian grammar, although his definition of the Interjection— "an Interjection expresses the passions of the soul" (ibid., p. 117) — is worthier of a poet than of a *Neugrammatiker.*

The piece that Byron intended to serve as a Preface to the Grammar clearly shows what otherwise attracted the future hero of Missolonghi to the Armenian subjects of the Ottoman and Persian Empires:

> These men are the priesthood of an oppressed and a noble nation, which has partaken of the proscription and bondage of the Jews and the Greeks, without the sullenness of the former or the servility of the latter. This people has attained riches without usury, and all the honours that can be awarded to slavery without intrigue. But they have long occupied, nevertheless, a part of the House of Bondage, who has lately multiplied her many mansions. It would be difficult, perhaps, to find the annals of a nation less stained with crimes than those of the Armenians, whose virtues have been those of peace, and their vices those of compulsion. But whatever may have been their destiny—and it has been bitter—whatever it may be in the future, their country must ever be one of the most interesting on the globe; and perhaps their language only requires to be more studied to become more attractive. If the Scriptures are rightly understood, it was in Armenia that Paradise was placed—Armenia, which has paid as dearly as the descendants of Adam for that fleeting participation of its soil in the happiness of him who was created from its dust. It was in Armenia that the flood first abated, and the dove alighted. But with the disappearance of Paradise itself may be dated almost the unhappiness of the country; for although long a powerful kingdom, it was scarcely ever an independent one, and the satraps of Persia and the pachas of Turkey have alike desolated the region where God created man in his own image.

Some of these facts, legends and sentiments may have derived from Byron's lessons with Awgerian. Certainly Yurij Veselovski assumed so, and embroidered them accordingly:

> The old man would relate how, far, far away, lived the people to whose service they devoted all their energies. He lives in his Motherland, sings the old songs of his grandfathers, preserves the ancient customs and beliefs, but still cannot distinguish in the distance any ray of light, dare not dream of a better future. . . . On that soil where his ancestors lived, the ruins of palaces, temples and fortresses lie scattered all around. For the stranger, those ruins say nothing, but for the people who created those now ruined buildings, even their solemn silence is familiar. . . . Avidly Byron listens to the old man's tales, and it seems to him that he has long been acquainted, intimate with that distant land of which the old man tells him, that land where the ancient ruins preserve the magnificent story of vanished glory and lost happiness.[15]

Certainly Byron must have listened attentively to what the monks of San Lazzaro told him, for he was at that time filled with admiration for them and their way of life, as his words preceding the above historical summary show: ". . . the society of the Convent of St. Lazarus . . . appears to unite all the advantages of the monastic institution, without any of its vices. The neatness, the comfort, the gentleness, the unaffected devotion, the accomplishments, and the virtues of the brethren of the order, are well fitted to strike the man of the world with the conviction that there is another and a better even in this life." The

last ten words have been chosen by the present monks as a fitting illustration of the thoughts of the poet on the stone plaque that now adorns the monastery walls, inscribed otherwise "*Alla memoria del poeta inglese Lord Byron, amico devoto dell'Armenia, morto per la liberazione della Grecia, 1788-1824.*"

Unfortunately, the Armenian cause that Byron espoused in his Preface was not that of his teacher, the faithful disciple of a creed that recognized principalities and powers, rendered unto Caesar what was Caesar's, and turned the other cheek, and it was Awgerian's refusal to publish Byron's Preface that aroused "passions of the soul" unconnected with Interjections, and led to an immediate breach between the poet and the hitherto respected community. This took place probably in February 1817, after a mere three to four months therefore of friendly cooperation, for already on March 3, 1817, he is writing to Murray, saying: "The Armenian Grammar is published but my Armenian Studies are suspended for the present—till my head aches a little less." Though he makes no reference there to the misunderstanding, there is no evidence that Byron set foot on the island after his temporary absence from Venice visiting Rome and Florence in April and May 1817. Moreover, as all who disapprove of emotion in matters of business will deplore, the incident led to a failure on the part of Lord Byron to honor his promise to subsidize the Grammar. As Awgerian puts it in his Journal: "Then at the request of his teacher he wrote a Preface for the Grammar in English, but because he spoke disparagingly (*ergitsank'ov*) in it concerning the Turks and Persians, Father Harut'iwn was not willing to publish it. And although he promised to write another, inoffensive (*anvnas*) preface, his heart had already grown cold, and he no longer wished to frequent the monastery, and thus the Grammar remained in manuscript form, and he did not give the money he had promised for its printing."[16] Thomas Moore represents Byron as losing his temper, shouting at the Mekhitarists, and upbraiding them as cowards and poltroons who fully deserved the brutal tyrants he had referred to,[17] but all that one knows of English reserve, from which no gentleman, albeit a poet too, of Byron's time could be immune, casts serious doubt on this Irish account, although some such thoughts may well have passed through the mind of one who was to write, in commiseration with the maidens of Greece,

My own (eye) the burning tear-drop laves
To think such breasts must suckle slaves.

(*The Isles of Greece*)

It would be hasty to assume that the Mekhitarists—for Awgerian must have discussed the matter with his colleagues—were totally unjustified in their caution. One suspects that it was not only, or even principally, Byron's censure of the Turks and the Persians that caused their concern, but his reference to "the House of Bondage, who has lately multiplied her many mansions," which could, with no strain to the imagination, apply to the Austrian overlords of Venice, whose secret police must surely have taken note of the presence in their Empire of the internationally known liberal (who was in fact soon to join the Carbonari). The Community had already displayed some very tactful diplomacy in securing various privileges and guarantees from Napoleon, one of Byron's heroes, during his Kingdom of Italy in 1810, mainly on the grounds of being completely unpolitical, and they certainly would not have wanted them revoked in the new Lombardo-Venetian Kingdom granted to Austria by the Congress of Vienna after Napoleon's fall because of a few fiery words, however well intentioned and inwardly appreciated, from a frequent guest at their monastery, who in any case, as a temporary visitor to the city, was far less vulnerable than they. Eventually the Mekhitarists were less cautious, for in 1852, between the suppression of the Venetian Republic by the Austrians in 1849 and the city's incorporation in the independent kingdom of Italy in 1866, Byron's Preface, "House of Bondage" and all, was included in their *Beauties of English Poets.* The Grammar was published in 1833. Long before either date, the poet was dead. The promised subsidy remained unpaid. Awgerian bore no grudge. In 1828, when Lady Blessington visited San Lazzaro and spoke with Father Pasquali she noted that he "spoke in terms of warm regard for Byron."[18]

Despite his defection in what might be considered a matter of monastery battels, however, Byron was clearly a very assiduous student of Armenian. And that Father Harut'iwn did not fail to direct Byron's mind against the crags it longed to encounter may be seen from the collection of pieces published in *Beauties of English Poets* which is subtitled *Lord Byron's Armenian Exercizes and Poetry.*[19] These include, in addition to a facsimile of "Lord Byron's English and Armenian handwriting"—and duty compels one to remark that certain characters therein, in particular that representing the initial letter of his surname, are decidedly diffident—so-called "Pieces of the Armenian History translated by Lord Byron to Exercize Himself in the Armenian Language." Unfortunately, one must record that the very first sentence of this passage, from Moses of Khoren, Book One, Chapter Eight, contains an error: the sentence *Արշակ մեծ արքայն Պարսից եւ Պարթեւաց, որ եւ ազգաւ իսկ Պարթեւ,*

ապստամբել ասեն ի Մակեդովնացւոցն (Arshak mets ark'ayn Parsits' ew Part'ewats', or ew azgaw isk Part'ew, apstambel asen i Makedovnats'wots'n) is not to be translated, with Byron, as "Arsaces the great king of the Persians and Parthians is said *with the Parthians* to have revolted from the Macedonians," but "Arsaces the great king of the Persians and Parthians, *who by race (was himself) also a Parthian,* is said to have revolted." Whether this and a number of other smaller errors of commission and omission are Byron's own rather than those of his teacher is difficult to decide, as is the degree of knowledge of Armenian to which Byron attained in three to four months of study. There is no reason to doubt that Byron could, with guidance from a teacher, negotiate the text of Moses of Khoren in a manner not entirely passive, apart from the fact that he had the Whiston's Latin translation of 1735 at his disposition. Modern students at Oxford are introduced to original texts after a few basic lessons on the grammar, and that without having hitherto, in the writer's experience, evinced any clear indication of Byron's intellectual brilliance. Byron's collaboration with Awgerian on his Armenian grammar for the purposes of publication meant that he must have gone over the paradigms many times. Dictionaries in his day were scarce, but apart from *Rivola's Dictionarium Armeno-Latinum,*[20] he would have had access to his teacher's material for his short Armenian-French dictionary published at San Lazzaro in 1817 (following his French-Armenian-Turkish dictionary published in 1811). The extent of Byron's knowledge of Armenian is clearly relevant to his translation work on the texts we shall be discussing below. On the evidence, there is no reason to assume that Byron blindly followed Italian translations provided by Awgerian: he knew enough to establish close contact with the originals. It was moreover probably his own academically trained eye that saw what would benefit most by translation. When he learned that the Armenian Bible contained a Letter from the Corinthians to St. Paul, with St. Paul's answer, an apocryphal Third Epistle to the Corinthians,[21] his interest was sufficiently aroused to urge him to prepare an English translation. In a letter to Moore dated March 31, he describes how he has rendered these epistles "into scriptural prose English." In his biography of the poet, Moore correctly surmises that Byron's version of these "spurious" letters, which he reproduces in full,[22] was "the first that has ever been attempted in English."[23] In fact, Byron was the first to render any Armenian text into English, since the Whiston Brothers chose a "learned" language, Latin, instead. The perfection of Byron's scriptural English is such that it could be fitted into the Authorized Version without being in any way obtrusive: for example, Epistle 3 to the Corinthians 3-4: "For because the Lord Jesus is about to fulfil his coming,

verily on this account do certain men pervert and despise his words. But I verily from the beginning have taught you that only which I myself received from the former Apostles, who always remained with the Lord Jesus Christ." In some cases, however, paraphrase has resulted in obscurity. For example, at verse 25, *որով հպարտացեալ յարգի լինէր չարն (orov hpartats'eal yargi linēr ch'arn),* which Byron renders "in which the evil spirit was glorified," is more accurately "wherewith the evil spirit, growing proud, was honoured"; *նովին մարմնովն կշտամբեալ յանդիմանեսցի (novin marmnovn kshtambeal yandimanests'i),* mistranslated by Byron as "by that same body he should be reproved and manifested," should be "by that same body he should be reproved and reproached".

Included also among Lord Byron's *Armenian Exercizes and Poetry* is a "Piece of a Synodical Discourse by St. Nierses [Nersēs] of Lampron [a twelfth-century Cilician author] translated by Lord Byron". Here again there are some inaccuracies in the translation. *Եւ յայնժամ իբրեւ զփեսայ շքեղազարդեալ էր տեսանել զճեմեալն յառագաստ իւր զՔրիստոս* is not, with Byron (p. 15), "It was beautiful then to behold Christ as a bridegroom nobly adorned for the nuptial chamber," but "And then one could have seen [lit., there was to see] Christ stepping into his bridal chamber as a nobly adorned bridegroom," though one might consider Byron's version to be loose rather than erroneous. The dramatic scene conjured up by Nersēs, rich in cosmic significance, close in spirit to Milton's *Paradise Regained,* clearly appealed to Byron's poetic instincts, as well as to the Calvinist in him who, as André Maurois has pointed out, "survived to the poet's dying day,"[24] for his translation is a fine piece of near-Biblical prose.

It was beautiful then to behold Christ as a bridegroom nobly adorned for the nuptial chamber, who spake with a soft voice to his most pure beloved [*առ կոյսն ողջախոհ*, *aṙ koysn oghjakhoh,* lit., to the wholesome-minded virgin]: "Enlarge the place of thy tent and of thy porch; spare not, plant it, lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes; for thou shalt break forth on the right hand and on the left, and thy seed shall inherit the gentiles, and thou shalt renew the ruined cities of the idolaters. Fear not, though till now by means of these I have covered thee with confusion. For I swear that I shall never repent to make my abode of pleasure with thee who art my repose for ever and ever." Then the first enemy, in ambush for his prey, perceiving that his snares were discovered, and that the worship of God flourished throughout the world, observing that those who had been deceived were redeemed, and that the celestial holiness poured forth its glory, that the instrument of hatred being broken, the fruits of charity began to multiply themselves, and the hope of all no longer turned to the earth, ascended to the heavenly abodes, forth from the cave of his malice he issued, like the lion roaring in his anger, and roamed about with open and insatiate jaws, to devour the church recovered by Christ.

That one brought up in the disciplines of an English public school and university should immerse himself in matters grammatical is but natural. That one who in his Journal records that History was his favorite subject at Harrow should strive to know as much as possible about the evolution of the Armenian nation is likewise understandable. That one with experience in steering his works through publishers and printers should negotiate on behalf of a fellow author is not unexpected. A priori, however, we could assume that a poet's main interest in studying a foreign culture would be in the imaginative creation of that culture, and in the case of Byron and Armenia, one would be right. Having at once perceived that the study of Armenian would certainly confront his mind with the hoped-for crags—indeed, one might say, in those days, a passage through a very Scylla and Charybdis—Byron's thoughts turned immediately, as we know from Awgerian's Journal, to the works of his fellow poets in the Armenian nation: "Then he asked him [Awgerian] to translate into Italian certain selected passages of Armenian poetry, *on account of which he wanted to learn their language* [my italics]. Father Harut'iwn translated certain pieces of ancient and modern poetic works, among which he particularly appreciated the ingenious Hymn composed by (Nersēs) Shnorhali to (Saint) Hṙipsimē." Aucher and Byron's *Grammar* in fact concludes with a section on Verse, and this seems to have been attributable entirely to Byron's initiative, for Awgerian writes: "Also with the help of his teacher he translated certain passages from the works of our ancestors, which he wished to include in the *Grammar* made for the study [of Armenian] by Englishmen."[25] The only translations from early authors in the *Grammar* are in fact quotations from the poets. The passage chosen to illustrate the fact that "the Antient Armenian Verses or Songs were not rhymed" (p. 141) is the renowned poem on the Birth of Vahagn preserved in the pages of Moses of Khoren's *History of Armenia*, which is left without translation unfortunately. The examples illustrating Armenian syllabic verse, consisting of lines from five to fifteen syllables, are sensitively translated by Byron, aided by Awgerian's Italian no doubt, though some concepts appear odd in English:

Բանաւոր ծառոց երեւեցան ծաղիկք,
Երփնազարդ գունով, անուշահոտ բուրմամբ:

Banawor tsaṙots' erewets'an tsaghikk',
Erp'nazard gunov, anushahot burmamb.

Flowers of rational plants [lit., trees] appeared
of various tints, and delicious odour.

Բոլորակ եմ կիսագունտ որպէս խորան,
Բնութեամբ կայուն, անձամբ շարժուն անտեսական:

Bolorak em kisagunt orpēs khoran,
Bnut'eamb kayun, andzamb sharzhun, antesakan.

I am a hemisphere round as a pavilion, by nature
firm, in reality moveable invisibly.

Գոչումն որոտման յետ հոսելոյն զանձրեւ կենաց,
Ամփոփեալ յերկինս, առ Առաքողն անդրէն դարձաւ:

Goch'umn orotman yet hoseloyn zandzrew kenats',
Amp'op'eal yerkins, aṙ Aṙak'oghn andrēn dardzaw.

The roar of thunder having diffused the rain of life, is
recovered to the heavens, returning to his origin.

Whatever the quality of the other verses and their translations, it must be remarked that this latter couplet, this quasi-haiku on a clap of thunder worthy of a Japanese master, is nowhere surpassed in Byron's own verse, not even by the closely parallel natural description in *Manfred* of the mountain cataract

Which casts up misty columns that become
Clouds raining from the re-ascended skies.

(III, 112-113).

Indeed, it seems probable that this image was borrowed from the Armenian. André Maurois[26] has pointed to the possible influence of Byron's conversations with the Armenian fathers of Manfred's duologue with the Abbot of St. Maurice, and it is perhaps not irrelevant that this thought presented itself independently, though much later, to me. Orberian[27] discerns behind the Abbot the figure of Awgerian or Somalian. Of the two, Awgerian, whom Byron described in his letter to Murray of December 27, 1816, as his "spiritual preceptor, pastor and master . . . a learned and pious soul," might appear to be the likelier of the two, though the "Superior of the Friars . . . a bishop, and a fine old fellow with the beard of a meteor" (ibid.), that is, the Abbot Step'anos Agonts' himself, cannot be discounted. There can be no doubt that much of Manfred was composed while Byron was frequenting San Lazzaro, probably under the olive tree where he liked to work and meditate, and which the monks to this day point out as "Byron's Mound." The first two acts of *Manfred* were composed between Byron's visit to the Alps in September 1816 and circa February

15, 1817, and Act Three was completed by March 9, 1817, because on this latter date he wrote to Murray, mentioning that he had sent him the first two acts "within the last three weeks" (a letter to Murray of March 3 says that the first act was sent "the other day") and that he was now enclosing the third. One can probably be more precise, for since in his letter of January 2, 1817, he tells Murray, "I have not done a stitch of poetry since I left Switzerland, and have not, at present, the *estro* upon me," one might infer that the first two acts of *Manfred*, if not composed on the spot in Switzerland, were likewise composed (certainly revised) in Venice between January 2 and February 15, 1817. We know that Byron was not insensitive to the implicit mission of the Mekhitarists, for did he not find "the virtues of the brethren of the order . . . well fitted to strike the man of the world with the conviction that there is another and a better life"? It is accordingly not difficult to hear Awgerian's inner voice, the doubtless unspoken message of his cloth,[28] in the Abbot's appeal to Manfred:

I would not pry into thy secret soul;
But if these things be sooth, there still is time
For penitence and pity: reconcile thee
With the true church, and through the church to heaven.
(III, i, 48-51)

And when the magician replies:

Old man, there is no power in holy men
. . . can exorcise
From out the unbounded spirit the quick sense
Of its own sins. . . .
(Ibid., 66, 73-75)

whom can we hear but Byron himself? For he, a poet, the most sensitive of mankind, would have keenly felt the incongruity of his position, in which he, a Puritan guilty of crimes and perversions which are the very stuff of penitentials, lived, for once in his adult life, among holy men devoted to godly works. His letters at the time show that he put a good face on it, but deep down he must have sensed the drama of the situation, and when Byron, after an evening spent with Signora Segati, encountered on the morrow Father Pascal, it was at times, one can be sure, as if Manfred stood before the Abbot of St. Maurice. That Byron was able to associate his two principal occupations at Venice in a lighter mood, however, is apparent from his letter to Moore of March 10, 1817: "There is a pair of great black eyes looking over my shoulder,

like the angel leaning over St. Matthew's in the old frontispieces to the Evangelists—so that I must turn and answer them instead of you." It is possible that Byron had experience of Western or Byzantine gospel manuscripts; what is certain is that he had most recently been shown manuscripts at San Lazzaro which most probably contained such a motif.[29] The impression made upon the poet by Armenian culture was clearly far from superficial.

Hitherto Byron has been thought to have confined his exercises in Armenian to the works of ancient and medieval writers although, as expected of one so passionately interested in modern poetry, he had requested from Awgerian, as we know from the latter's Journal, information concerning modern as well as ancient Armenian verse. Until recently, however, there was no evidence known to exist that Byron had translated anything from a modern Armenian work. In 1976, however, Professor Jerome McGann, in examining Byron's archive at John Murray Ltd. in London in connection with the current edition of the *Complete Poetical Works* of Byron for the Oxford University Press, came across a handwritten document entitled "Translation from the Armenian. The Pleasures of the Summer Houses of Byzantium," and inquired if one could identify the Armenian original. A short search at the Bibliothèque Arménienne in the Square Alboni in Paris led to a poem by the well-known Armenian geographer Ghukas Inchichian, under a title that may be translated into English as *The Byzantine Summer-House in the Straits of Constantinople, called by the Turks Boğaz Içi* (The Golden Horn).[30] The best-known work of this author was to be his *Geography of Ancient Armenia*,[31] published at San Lazzaro in 1822, but already in 1804 and 1806 he had published, in collaboration with Step'anos Agonts', the abbot in Byron's time, volumes in a four-volume *Geography of the Four Continents*,[32] the first volume of which, devoted to a description of the Armenian lands as they were in his own day, is of the first importance, and used extensively by H. Hübschmann in his *Die altarmenischen Ortsnamen.*[33] What was more natural for the monks of San Lazzaro, when asked for examples of modern Armenian poetry, than to point to an original work published a dozen years previously by a member of their own order? As it happened, at the time of Byron's visit Father Inchichian was residing not in Venice but in his order's "Byzantine Summerhouse" at Constantinople. The Abbot, however, was not slow to apprise his poetical and geographical colleague of the arrival at San Lazzaro of an English lord who might be thought to be a kindred soul, on the evidence, for example, of his *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, which could be considered a travel book close, outwardly at least, to the Mekhitarist's own. Inchichian's reply, dated March 24, 1817, pre-

served in the archives of San Lazzaro and brought to my attention by Father Sahak, head of Seminary, shows that the great geographer had not lost his interest in poetry, and was ready to assist the English poet, and further Armenian culture, with his mature advice, to the extent of suggesting a suitable poetico-geographical theme in case, no doubt, Lord Byron's imagination should desert him.

Inchichian's letter, too late to influence events at San Lazzaro, for by March 2 the poet had abandoned his Armenian Studies, is of interest also for its account of the impression Lord Byron made upon the community of Constantinople during his visit on his Grand Tour in 1810. The relevant part of his letter would read in English translation,

> Let us appreciate that Englishman, Lord Byron, for the English here in Constantinople hold him in great esteem and say that he is the foremost poet in the whole of England. Some of them are acquainted with him, since a few years ago he came here to Constantinople; they indicate that he is deformed in one foot. Since he is so renowned in [the world of] poetry, ask him plainly for a eulogy in verse upon our religion, suggesting yourself a subject to him, for the eulogy of such a man at such a time must be ranked above jewels and treasure. Let me for my part here propose a subject to stimulate his imagination. Minerva has conceived the wish to travel from Europe to Asia, [and] lifting her feet [*zots iwr ambards(e)al*, a close calque on Tk. *ayağa kalkmak* "rise to one's feet"] to tread on Armenia[n soil], she has chosen a route by sea rather than by land; but learning that Neptune opposes her journey, since in [people's] ignorance of Asia his sea would flourish more greatly with shipping, she has entered a bay in the Adriatic Sea onto some small island disguised in the form of an oriental bearded old man [lit., men], as [she did in the form of] that certain other Mentor in the days of Telemachus. Neptune, learning of this, has come to do her battle with his trident, [the three prongs of] which are Ignorance, Prejudice and Fanaticism. . . . [Minerva, knowing that England is "the ruler and the friend of Neptune," turns to England for help. England places Minerva on her lion and unicorn and thus enables her to go to Armenia] . . . inviting her to inform the English Academy about the island, and teach her Oxonians Armenian along with Greek. . . ."

The reference to the "English Academy" suggests that Inchichian had heard that Byron had just, in 1816, been elected a Fellow of the Royal Society, an honor he could hardly have refrained from mentioning to the scholars of the Academy of San Lazzaro. Both of Inchichian's desiderata were in fact to be fulfilled, eventually, for although the Royal Society was soon to lose interest in the humanities (one hopes it is not too ungenerous to wonder whether the election of the notorious lord served as the catalyst for this scientific orientation), Armenian Studies were to be well represented in the British Academy from its very inception in 1901 in the person of Viscount Bryce, shortly followed, in 1903, by the election of F. C. Conybeare, and it was not long (viewed, as befits academic progress in Britain, sub specie aeternitatis) before a chair of Armenian was in fact founded in the University of Oxford (1965).

Inchichian goes on to say that such an English panegyric by Byron would pass from hand to hand among the English, "and will be for us also in the future a memorial and a testimony useful to be placed in front of the eyes of our own [representatives of the ?] Armenian genius." What happened when Byron did in fact write a panegyric, albeit in prose, namely his Preface to the *Grammar*, we have seen.

The poem by Inchichian translated in part by Byron comprises in all 253 pages. The Prologue (*Nakhergank'*) contains five stanzas, and Canto the First (*Erg Aṙajin*) seventy stanzas numbered 6 to 75. Each stanza is a quatrain of decasyllabic verse in monorhyme on *-in* with a caesura after the fifth syllable. Byron translated the Prologue and seventeen stanzas of Canto I, nos. 6 to 22, which he renumbers as 1 to 17. The text is as follows:[34]

ԱՄԱՌԱՆՈՑ ԲԻՒԶԱՆԴԵԱՆ

Նախերգանք

1

Քաղցրասցին շարժուածք՝ երգոց քերթողին,
զբիւզանդեան երգել՝ տեսիլ նեղուցին,
կենդանագրեսցեն՝ մատունք իմ ձեռին,
ըզգեղեցկադիր՝ զայս գործ արարչին:

2

Քոյդ քաղցրիկ տեսիլ՝ վայր զուարթագին,
վառէ ըզգեղուած՝ սրտի հագներգուին,
իսկ քաղցրաշարժել՝ ձայն հագներգողին,
ըզքոյդ նորոգէ՝ զըստեղծուած կրկին:

3

Զի քո բազմելով՝ յայս գահ բընածին,
քոյոցդ երեւիս՝ իբր յառագաստին,
բայց քընար երգոց՝ նըկարք իմ գըրչին,
վերառեալ տանին՝ ի ցոյց աշխարհին:

4

Յանձն իմ ազդեսցէ՝ զուարթուն ոգին,
որ ի հեշտալին՝ շրջի վայր երկրին,

յեղուլ ուսուսցէ՝ ըստ իմ արուեստին,
ըզգոլ նիւթական՝ յաննիւթ գոլ բանին:

5

Զայն ցօղ լուսաբուղխ՝ ցօղեա յիս երկին,
դու երկինք շնչեա՝ զայն շունչ, զայն հոգին,
որ յարարածոց՝ հանէ արարչին,
եւ յեղականաց՝ ի փառս անեղին:

Երգ Առաջին

6

Անծանօթ էի՝ մեծութեան երկրին,
անտեղեակ դըրից՝ ծովու ցամաքին,
զիմ գիծ տեսութեան՝ առ կէտ եզերտին,
սահման դատէի՝ ծագաց աշխարհին:

7

Զայն առ իս եհաս՝ ձայն բընականին,
ինձ բանականիս՝ որ տէրս եմ նորին,
շրջել գոլորտիւք՝ իւր հողագնտին,
ընտրել ինձ տեղի՝ ամարանոցին:

8

Զիմ բանականիս՝ ըզնըկուն մարմին,
առ ի չաշխատել՝ գիւտ հընարեցին,
զիս մեծարելով՝ ի սայլ ինչ բարձին,
որ ձիավարեալ, յառաջէր ինքնին:

9

Ոչ թէ իմ շարժմամբ՝ նոքա շարժէին,
այլ անշարժ կալովս՝ վերաթեւէին,
բայց զանձն իմ անշարժ՝ այնպէս ձըգէին,
մինչ զիս կարծէի՝ թռչուն երկրային:

10

Նախ առ ի ցամաք՝ զիս շրջեցուցին,
ընդ քառեակ կազմուած՝ նըմին բընածին,
ի դաշտ, ի հովիտ՝ յանտառ, ի լերին,
զի անձաւք եւ ձորք՝ չեն ինչ յայս կարգին:

11

Իւրաքանչիւր դիրք՝ հաճոյ իմ սրտին,
բայց երբ շրջէի՝ ի դաշտավայրին,
ոչ տեսանէի՝ ըզտեսիլ հովտին,
եւ ոչ յանտառին՝ ըզտեսիլ լերին:

12

Հասի ես այսպէս՝ ի գըլուխ լերին,
առ որով տեսի՝ հովիտ ինչ դիւրին,
եւ դաշտ լայնածիր՝ հուպ առ անտառին,
Ջըրոց խոխոջանք՝ կենդանականին:

13

Այսչափ պարառումն՝ քառեակ տեսլենին,
յապուշ զիս կրթէր՝ ի հայեցուածին,
եւ առ բազմութեան՝ իմ առարկային,
նոյն եւ բազմացեալ՝ թուէր ինձ անձն իմ:

14

Զի առ բազմագոյն՝ ձգտի իմ ոգին,
զայս վայր ընտրեցի՝ յամարանոց իմ,
զի չէի ծանօթ՝ հեշտութեան ծովին,
յարմար դատեցի՝ զտեսիլ չորեսին:

15

Ապա լաստիւ ինչ՝ զիս շրջեցուցին,
որոյ գիւտ մեծ էր՝ քան զայլ ցամաքին,
երկայն երիզիւք՝ խոտաբոյս Նիւթին,
ոչ գիտեմ որպէս՝ վարէր զիս հեշտին:

16

Ոչ միայն չըզգաս՝ զշարժումն ինչ նորին,
այլ եւ ոչ ըզնոյն՝ ըզշարժուածդ անձին,
եւ մինչ դու անշարժ՝ կարծես ի նըմին,
նա ըզքեզ վարէ՝ հանէ ի տեղին։

17

Խաղացի նովաւ՝ յանդունդ նահանգին,
լուծականին այն՝ տարեր անչափին,
ելի ըզլերամբք՝ ըզձորովք նորին,
բայց առհասարակ՝ փոփոխականին։

18

Ունի ըզլերինս՝ իբրեւ ցամաքին,
դաշտ լայն կապուտակ՝ մեծ քան ըզնորին,
բայց իբրեւ գիջեալ՝ դաշտանայր դիւրին,
անդ կորուսանէր՝ գիւր հաստուած լերին։

19

Եւ իբրեւ լինէր՝ լեառն ինչ ահագին,
անդէն եղծանէր՝ ըզծաւալ դաշտին,
ոչ ըզմայլեցաւ՝ սիրտ իմ ի նըմին,
այլ միայն պակնոյր՝ յահեղ անդնդին։

2 0

Մուծին զիս ապա՝ յայս նեղուց ծովին,
ընդ մէջ պոնտոսին՝ եւ պրոպոնտոսին,
նորոգէր յայնժամ՝ գիծք իմ եզերտին,
ապարիզաճեմք՝ տեսողականին։

21

Զի չըքեզ տեսիլ՝ յիմ ձախակողմին,
չըքեզ եւ տեսիլ՝ յիմ յաջակողմին,
եւ ես ինքնաշարժ՝ վարեալ ի նաւին,
տեսանեմ հընգեակ՝ տեսիլս ի նըմին։

22

Ըզդաշտ ըզհովիտ՝ ըզտեսիլ լերին,
զանտառ ծառախիտ՝ ըզծով ընդ նոսին,
աչք իմ ի ցամաք՝ ոտք իմ ի ծովին,
կէս իմ ի ցամաք՝ կէս իմ ի ծովին։

Byron’s version, preserved in the manuscript written in his own hand, reads as follows:

Translation from the Armenian.-
The pleasure houses of the Summer of Byzantium

Prologue
Stanza 1st.

The enthusiasm of the poet should be great - and (the *deletum*) his song sweet - to sing the beauties of the Byzantine strait - to describe (them *del.*) to the life - with my feeble pen this most lovely (valley the *del.*) work of the Creator.

2.

(Yo *del.*) Thy sweet view - and pleasant place - inflames the thoughts of the poet - the voice of the bard to his lyre shall renew & multiply (*supra lineam*) thy creation.

3.

Because being upon this throne of Nature - thou appearest as a nuptial chamber - but the lyre of (this *del.*) song & the voice of the bard shall present thee to the view of the world.

4.

Inspire my soul - thou awakening Spirit - who walkest in delicious places - teach me to (conduct *del.*) the material being of their beauties in the immortality of words.

5.

That dazzling (sp *del.*) dew of Heaven, rain upon me! breathe that (thy *correctum*) Spirit upon me - which from the creation conducts to the Creator and from the things-made gives Glory to the Maker.

Canto 1st

[1.]

I was ignorant of the grandeur of the earth - I did not (knot *del.*) know the sites of the ocean & ⌈earth (*sup. lin.*). The limits of the horizon bounded at once my view & my imagination of things.

2.

The voice comes (to *del.*) upon (*sup. lin.*) me - the voice of Nature - To me who am a being endowed with reason & her master - to walk the world - to discover the loveliest (place *del.*) abode (*sup. lin.*) of Summer.

3.

(My work *del.*) Reason teaches me not to weaken with fatigue my feeble (power *del.*) body (*sup. lin.*) - I will mount a car, drawn by horses.

4.

(With *del.*) I stood firm, -but the car moved- So ⌈smoothly (*sup. lin.*) that I believed myself a bird of Heaven.

5.

First I moved oer the land - oer her four departments - the fields - the valleys - the woods - & mountain's (*sic*) - because the caverns and excavations are not of this order.

6.

All these ⌈are (*sup. lin.*) pleasing to my heart - but when walking in the field I did not see the valley - nor in the wood - did I behold the mountain.

7.

In this manner I arrive (*vice* arrived?) at the top of the mountain -near the wood - & ⌈heard (*sup. lin.*) the murmur of living waters.

8.

So much did the aspect of these four views make me wonder - and ac-

cording to the multitude of objects I appeared to multiply my being.

9.

Because I enlarged my spirit in pervading this place of Summer -(because *del.*) not yet knowing the delight of Ocean.

10.

Afterwards with a raft I voyaged - & this invention appeared more wonderful - and with a sail constructed from a plant I advanced faster than before.

11.

I did not perceive the motion of the ⌜raft (*sup. lin*) - nor even my own -and while you think yourself (firm *del.*) standing (*sup. lin.*) - (you *del.*) still (*sup. lin.*) - you arrive in port.

12.

I have penetrated to the middle of the watery abyss with this raft - the immense element - I passed oer its ⌜watery (*sup. lin.*) mountains & valleys, but always fluctuating.

13.

The Ocean hath its mountains as the earth - plain & field of azure hue -greater than those of the earth - but when the waves become a plain they lose their mountains.

14.

And when it became a rough mountain - it quickly destroyed the (st *del.*) smoothness of the plain - and my heart was not delighted with this spectacle - but troubled at the deep abyss.

15.

I introduce myself to the strait - between the Pontus and Propontis -and reviewed the line of my horizon (and *del.*) ⌜with an (*sup. lin.*) ample view.

16.

Because ⌜there was (*sup. lin*) the delicious view on my left hand - and that on my right hand also - and I was conveyed in a selfmoving vessel - saw five views at once.

17.

The plain - the valley - the mountain - the ⌜leafy (*sup. lin.*) grove - and the sea - (in *del.*) my eyes are on the earth - my feet on the sea - half on sea and half on shore.

A literal translation of the first stanza of the Prologue would read: "Sweet shall be the movements of the songs of the poet, / To sing the view of the Byzantine strait; / The fingers of my hand shall describe-to-the-life [calque on Gk. ζωγραφεω] / This beautifully-situated work of the Creator." A comparison with Byron's version shows that he is very ready to adapt his translation, by paraphrase and emendation, following the dictates of good English poetic style, as doubtless he would have been taught to do at Harrow with regard to translation from the Classics—the rule being that one should aim for accuracy in one's rendering, but good English should not be sacrificed for the sake of foreign idioms. The poem is no easy one to translate: the vocabulary is rich, the style and grammar complex (the very first word, for example, is a verb in the aorist subjunctive middle, not the first thing the beginner in Armenian learns). Byron's version is polished, and on the whole accurate. He renders *sharzhuatsk'*, lit., movements, as "enthusiasm," that is, in its sense of "motion of the mind, emotion," whereas it is more likely used here in the sense of "the quality of carrying on the interest of the reader," as in "Latin verses full of movement and fervour."[35] This rendering "enthusiasm" has compelled Byron to add "be great" in his version, since the epithet "sweet" cannot qualify that emotion. The rendering of *kendanagrests'en* as "describe to the life" is at once literal and elegant. Byron has rendered the jejune equivalent of "the fingers of my hand" as "with my feeble pen," which, though itself a cliché, has at least the advantage of endowing the original verse-filling succession of syllables, an obvious *chenille*, with some modicum of meaning. Byron's "lovely" for *geghets'kadir* "beautifully-placed" translates only the first part of the compound.

Without undertaking to give an exhaustive list of every deviation from the original, which Armenian specialists can easily draw up for themselves, I select a few instances of interest to those mainly concerned with the writings of Lord Byron himself.

In stanza 2 of the Prologue, Byron renders *dzayn hagnergoghin* (1. 3) "voice of the bard" as "voice of the bard to his lyre," possibly an attempt to render all the nuances of the complicated, barely explicable compound *hagn-ergogh* "rhapsodist, minstrel, bard."

In line 2 he has rendered *sirt* "heart" as "thoughts," and has added "multiply" to line 4.

In stanza 3 of the Prologue, line 2, the equivalent of "thou appearest to thine own as in a nuptial chamber" has become in Byron's version "thou appearest as a nuptial chamber," partly owing to a slip of the pen. In line 3 "the images of my pen" has become Byron's "voice of the bard," probably because the poet construed *im gĕrch'in* as "of me the writer," a possible but less likely interpretation. Line 4, "taking (thee) up, lead (thee)" is rendered by Byron with greater economy as "shall present thee to."

In stanza 4 of the Prologue, line 1, Byron has improved the original's equivalent of "the waking spirit shall inform my soul" to the effective apostrophe, "Inspire my soul, thou awakening Spirit," doubtless in an irresistible upsurge of true poetic feeling, here no respecter of grammatical persons; perhaps it was also an urgent appeal to his Muse to come to the aid of the author (alas, too late?). Inchichian's "place of the earth" becomes Byron's "places"; "(the spirit) shall teach" becomes "teach me"; "the material being in the immaterial being of the word" becomes the much happier "the material being of their beauties in the immortality of words," another Byronic improvement, although, of course, the English poet was not inhibited by metrical considerations.

In stanza 5 of the Prologue, Inchichian's "Heaven, drop upon me that light-welling dew" becomes one of the finest phrases in Byron's version, "that dazzling dew of Heaven rain upon me" a most felicitous rendering recalling Shelley's rendering of Goethe's "schön wie am ersten Tag" as "fair as on Creation's morn."

In the first stanza of Canto I (numbered 1 by Byron, 6 by Inchichian), the probable sense of verses 3 and 4 is "My line of vision to the point of limits, I judged to be the boundary of the ends of the earth." Inchichian's *kēt ezertin* is an attempt at an Armenian equivalent of Gk. *horizōn* that is not very learned; *kēt ezerats'* would be more Classical. One hesitates to amend the text to *kēt ezerk'in* (which would also be a barbarous form, treating the Classical nominative plural *ezerk'* as a singular and adding a genitive singular ending *-in*), since it is possible that the poet, having one rhyme in the stanza in *-k'in*, intended to resort to the mainly medieval plural in *-ti*, although the genitive of that should be *-tu(n)*. Byron masterfully renders the verses as "The limits of the horizon bounded at once my

view and my imagination of things," which is an interesting example of what may happen to a handful of raw vocables and ideas when passed through the crucible of a true poet's mind, though no doubt Awgerian threw in a few Italian particles.

Stanza 2 (7) of Canto I is accurately and elegantly translated by Byron, as a literal translation will show: "A voice has come to me, the voice of the natural (world), to me, rational-one, who am master of the same, to walk-round the circuits of its earthy-globe, to choose for myself a place for a summer-house." Byron's "loveliest abode of Summer" is something of a gloss, though very pretty.

Byron's version of Stanza 3 (8) is a rough paraphrase of a rather clumsy original, which could be literally rendered as, "They have devised an invention so as not to tax the poor body of me, rational-one, (and) honouring me, they lifted me onto some cart which, horse-drawn, advanced of itself."

Stanza 4 (9) is likewise sensibly paraphrased by Byron, who amends (on Awgerian's advice?) Inchichian's *t'ṙch'un erkrayin* "earthly bird" to read that for which it must be a misprint, viz. *t'rch'un erknayin* "heavenly bird," Byron's "bird of Heaven." The original could be translated as, "Not by (any) motion of mine did they move (me), but with my remaining motionless they flew up, but they drew my unmoving person in such a way that I thought myself a heavenly [reading *erknayin*] bird."

In Stanza 5 (10) Byron's "excavations" for *dzork'* "valleys" (l.4) is odd; the word is given its normal English equivalent in Stanza 12 (17). Byron has changed Inchichian's "fourfold structure" (l. 2) sensibly to "her (the land's) four departments."

Byron's version of Stanza 6 (11) is almost word for word. A completely literal translation would be, "Each site (was) pleasing to my heart, / But when I walked in the field / I did not see the view of the Valley, / Nor in the wood the view of the mountain."

In Stanza 7 (12) Byron's "I heard the murmur of living waters" is a felicitous translation of line 4, *jĕrots' khokhojank' kendanakanin* in which the first word would be better amended to *jĕroy* with which the adjective, in the singular, would then agree ("the murmur of living water").

In Stanza 8 (13) Byron has rationalized as "the multitude of objects" Inchichian's less happy "multitude of my project" (Armenian *aṙarkay* can mean both "object" and "objective, project, aim").

In Stanza 9 (14) Byron's "pervading" is used in its rare etymological sense to represent Inchichian's *dzkti*, a miswritten root aorist for the correct *dzgtets'i*, "I extended (my spirit)." Byron omits to translate line 4, "I judged suitable the four views," which is fairly otiose.

In Stanza 10 (15) Byron makes good sense of Inchichian's *erkayn eriziwk'* "with long bands / fillets," rendering this as "with a sail," a meaning that would have been more usually conveyed by Armenian *aṙagast-* "curtain, sail," (*layn aṙagastiwk'* "with broad sails" would have been metrically equivalent, as well as avoiding the post-Classical, vocalically irregular *eriz-iwk'* from *eriz* and its possible confusion in the context of "waggon of the dry-land" with *erizawk'*, instrumental plural of *erēz* "desert, sandy plains"). The Armenian poet is referring to the long strips of linen which, when sewn together, form a sail. Byron abbreviates line 2, a literal translation of which would be "of which the invention was greater than (that of) the waggon of the dry-land." Byron's "I advanced faster than before" represents line 4, lit., "it conveyed me easily."

Byron reasonably paraphrases most of Stanza 11 (16), lit., "Not only dost thou not perceive any motion of the same, but neither (dost thou feel) the same movements of (thy) self, and while thou thinkest thyself motionless in it, it conveys thee, takes thee to the place."

In Stanza 12 (17) Byron has "penetrated" for Inchichian's "leapt" "watery abyss" for Inchichian's "bottomless region." He abbreviates to "the immense element" Inchichian's line 2, lit., those immense elements of the liquid, but compensates by adding "watery" to line 3, "mountains and valleys." Byron's "always fluctuating" stands for Inchichian's lit., "generally changeable" (line 4).

In Stanza 13 (18) Byron's "plain and field of azure hue" for line 2, lit., "broad blue plain," is stylish. He restores to normal as "mountains" Inchichian's clumsy *hastatuats lerin* "consolidation of mountain" forced upon him by the exigencies of the rhyme (*hastatuats* is not attested in Classical Armenian, though it is a theoretically possible nominal collective form).

In Stanza 14 (19) Byron appears to have deliberately reduced the melodrama: he renders as "rough mountain" Inchichian's "terrible mountain" (line 1), as "troubled" Inchichian's *paknoyr* "was terrified," and as "deep abyss" Inchichian's "fearful abyss" (line 4).

In Stanza 15 (20) Byron has "I introduced myself" for "they introduced me" (line 1), and with "reviewed the line of my horizon with an ample view" has made good sense of lines 3 and 4, lit., "then was renewed the line (*plurale tantum*) of my boundaries (i.e., my horizon), going-furlongs, of (*or* to) the visible."

Stanza 16 (21) is generally elegantly rendered by Byron, who has with "I was conveyed in a self-moving vehicle" tidied up line 3, lit., "and I, self-moving, being conveyed in the boat"; "[I] saw five views at once" renders Inchichian's "I see this five-fold view in the same."

In Stanza 17 (22), Byron, as in Stanza 13 (18), restores as "mount-

ain" Inchichian's rhyme-dictated circumlocution *tesil lerin* "view of the mountain" (line 1). His rather idyllic "leafy grove" reduces the scale of Inchichian's "forest thick-with-trees" (line 2), but otherwise this effective stanza of Inchichian is accurately rendered.

Inchichian's poem continues for another 53 stanzas (nos. 23-75), but Byron apparently translated no more. It was kinder perhaps to leave the Armenian father's poem on the imaginative high note of Stanza 17 (22). One can see why Byron was attracted by the poem. He had himself expressed admiration for the site of Constantinople five years previously, in Canto II of *Childe Harold:*

> Nor oft I've seen such sight, nor heard such song
> As woo'd the eye, and thrilled the Bosphorus along
>
> (st. 79)

Canto IV of *Childe Harold* must have been largely written in the same year, 1817, in which he translated the Armenian poem, since his dedication of the Canto to Hobhouse is dated January 2, 1818. In this Canto he imagines himself a voyager in a small and vulnerable boat:

> And from the planks, far shatter'd o'er the rocks,
> Built me a little bark of hope, once more
> To battle with the ocean and the shocks
> Of the loud breakers, and the ceaseless roar
> Which rushes on the solitary shore.
>
> (st. 105)

That, although probably more than a coincidence, is clearly no reason to assume any profound influence of Inchichian's poem on Byron's. Indeed, one can only applaud the good father's decision to devote his energies thereafter solely to academic geography in prose. The poem is light in tone, notes of an innocent abroad who can surely not have been all that innocent (though he was brought up in a monastery, he could not, at Venice, have been so unused to sea and ships as he pretends). With its rigid monorhymed ten-syllable verse in which the caesura after the fifth syllable is marked, as with a nail driven in by a hammer, by a *but‘* (‘, half a comma), it recalls the amateur rhymes that any German schoolboy can shake out of his sleeve in letters home, though usually without the genius of Wilhelm Busch. Byron was impressed by the rhyming potentialities of Armenian, the more so since, as Chaucer said, "of rhyme ther is suche paucitee in Englysshe." But he found the monorhyme monotonous, as he writes in a manuscript preserved by John Murray Ltd: "The Armenians in their poetry have a power from

the wealth of their language of composing poems of many hundred lines, all ending with different words, but the same rhyme. This may be monotonous, but shews copiousness." However, Inchichian's poem is not devoid of merit, and displays a number of felicitous touches. The final couplet may, indeed, be appreciated in its literal form by anyone who, like Lord Byron, has stood on the tiny island in the Venetian lagoon:

> My eyes are on dry land, my feet are on the sea.
> Half of me is on dry land, and half is in the sea.[36]

How much Armenian, then, did Lord Byron in fact know? Given the very short time, a matter of three months, that he spent on the language, he could not have attained to any profound knowledge of its intricacies, that is for sure. It is, however, safe to say that he knew more than that other famous English man of letters of the nineteenth century, George Borrow, who had six years to proceed from an erroneous explanation of Armenian *tsov*, which he connected with English *sea* in *Lavengro* (1851),[37] and the correct conjugation of *sirem* "I love" in the present indicative active in *Romany Rye* (1857). Byron was not the man to be satisfied with philological bits and pieces. He went to the heart and the soul of the matter, as his various exercises on the alphabet, grammar, history, and poetry of the Armenians show. I think my colleagues, the dons of Oxford, would say that Byron showed, on the evidence we have considered, *promise* in Armenian Studies, and had, by virtue of his knowledge of Greek and Latin and Ottoman History, a solid foundation upon which to build. The zeal with which he threw himself into these studies and the amount he achieved in the few months he spent at San Lazzaro can provoke nothing short of admiration on the part of a professor, and may be recommended for emulation on the part of the student. Alas, at the age of thirty-six he was dead. But though the world had lost a potential Armenian scholar, it had already gained a poet. We must get our priorities right: it is the historian and the philologist who have the more to learn from the poet and the artist, from those whose talent seems too large for the confines of one human soul. That Lord Byron had more to teach Armenologists than they could ever have taught him is clear. We have little written in the Armenian character by his hand other than his (rather shaky) signature. But without making any sweeping pronouncements ex-cathedra, however tempting, I would like to ask the Armenians how many universally recognized geniuses have traced as much as one Mesropian character. *Khent*, indeed!

Epilogue

Byron, whose natural beauty was remarked upon by many of his contemporaries and is evident to us from his numerous portraits, was not averse to gilding the lily: he loved dressing up. The Britons have been long famous for it, and Byron's Scottish blood and English nobility entitled him to some splendid outfits. Harrow School clad him in its distinctive uniform, and the University of Cambridge encouraged him — in the words of my late friend Paul Wittek — to "disguise himself as a scholar" in a most spectacular fashion, since noble commoners were entitled, as one can see from a contemporary print of Byron as an alumnus of that University, to wear a heavily brocaded gown similar to that now worn by the Chancellor of the University of Oxford. Byron's own taste for the exotic led him, at the age of twelve, to dress himself as a Turk for a fancy-dress ball, and at the age of twenty-one to have his portrait painted in Albanian costume in the course of his Grand Tour. An oil painting of the poet now hangs in San Lazzaro, but he is not clad in Armenian garb, lay or ecclesiastical. Was this an opportunity the poet missed? An interesting legend reported — or invented (for romantic poets are frequently outdone by even more romantic biographers) — by the twentieth century Armenian writer R. Orberian has it that Byron did in fact don the distinctive Armenian cucullus and cassock (*knkugh* and *kapay*), and that in circumstances which would, if true, convincingly prove the wisdom of the Abbot's reluctance to allow the (excessively) romantic poet to dwell overnight in the precincts of the island monastery. We know from Byron's letter to the Hon. Douglas Kinnaird from Venice, April 24, 1819, at which time he lodged at the Palazzo Mocenigo on the Grand Canal, that he was attracted to Teresa, Countess Guiccioli, though this was a couple of years after he had ceased to have any known contact with San Lazzaro. "I have fallen in love," he writes, "within the last month, with a Romagnuola Countess from Ravenna, the spouse of a year of Count Guiccioli, who is sixty — the girl twenty." How the good fathers of San Lazzaro came to be implicated in this affair is narrated as follows by Orberian, who must belong to the *Se non è vero è ben trovato* school of Armenian history so brilliantly inaugurated by the Father of Armenian Literature, Moses of Khoren himself. And that, alas! in the learned journal of the Venice Mekhitarists, *Bazmavēp*:

> In Venice at that time it was the custom that newly-wedded couples from the nobility would go, a few days after the wedding, on a pilgrimage to the Armenian monastery, where the wife would first enter the church alone; then, in the great hall [the refectory?], the Abbot and the monks, after prayers and blessings, would charge their beakers full of the purple wine of Armenia with the new bridegroom, while the bride, kneeling before

the lead image of the Holy Virgin, would perform her vow.

One morning, Byron, having donned a monastic garb, had come there to look at the inscription *O Solitudo, Sola Beatitudo* [!]. Here he met his first friend Father Somalian, who smilingly extended his hand to the poet and said in an enthusiastic tone:

"Our monastery is very fortunate this month, for we are to receive the third childless lady of the nobility to come on a pilgrimage at this time, and the brotherhood will be glad of the contribution she will make."

At that very moment, a gondola adorned with silk brocade came to a halt just at the point where, a little further on, the image of the Madonna stood in a niche in the rocks. A young woman in bridal costume jumped lightly out, and went to kneel in front of the Madonna to pray. Father Somalian went indoors immediately, to entertain the new bridegroom in a fitting fashion on the other side of the island.

Byron the Monk suddenly started: the new bride praying but a small distance away was Teresa Gamba! The arms of the Duchy of Guiccioli on the gondola now caught his eye, and then he understood: that Italian beauty, too, had left him never to return. He stood for some time as though nailed to the spot. Finally he murmured: "Teresa! Teresa!"

With a graceful motion the newly-wed bride turned towards the unrecognised monk — and suddenly she, too, murmured: "Harold!"

No other word did they exchange with one another before Count Guiccioli and Father Somalian returned having quaffed the cup of blessing. Teresa's voice had reached the ear of the jealous old man. He recognised 'the accursed poet', and shouted in his face: "What! You are here! In *this* monastery?!"

Then, turning to Father Somalian, he exclaimed: "Cast this wild animal in chains, for unless you do, he will not see the light of the sun for much longer!"

Teresa, in a paroxysm of trembling, had thrown herself back into the gondola, which the old man boarded clumsily, and within a minute they had disappeared behind the island.

Two souls passed a sleepless night in the monastery. Father Somalian, for his part, murmured some penitential prayers for the poet on his bended knees. Byron paced up and down his room until the dawn.

"I feel that I love Teresa, and that she loves me," he thought. "But alas! It is too late!"[38]

This delicious scenario cries out for illumination in oils, or at least acrylic, and one wonders how much longer historical portraitists can ignore the call. Being landlocked, alas, Armenia has no marines.

NOTES

1. Giving the benefit of the doubt to Awgerian, who records this date in his Journal (*Ink'napatum Ōragrut'iwn*). John Cam Hobhouse, in his Diary, gives the date as November 13, a considerable discrepancy, the more so since one might have expected both Byron's friend, who accompanied him on his visit to the island, and his Armenian teacher, to know when Byron first arrived at San Lazzaro. Consideration of different chronological styles will not remove the discrepancy, since both the (tardy) English and the Catholic Armenians of Venice (unlike the Armenian Orthodox) had adopted the Gregorian calendar, which in any case differed from the Julian in the nineteenth century by only twelve days November 13, O.S. November 25, N.S.). But students of Armenia are quickly inured to chronological puzzles: for them there is no escape from mathematics.

2. "Thoughts Suggested by a College Examination," *Hours of Idleness.*

3. In September 1813 Byron lent the book to Moore: "I send you . . . Castellan, and three vols on Turkish literature, not yet looked into. The *last* [Toderini's *Della letteratura turchesca*, 1787] I will thank you to read, extract what you want, and return in a week, as they are lent to me by that brightest of Northern constellations, [Sir John] Mackintosh." The phrasing is ambiguous, but the "not looked into" must refer to Toderini's work, recently borrowed, and not to Castellan, for nobody, not even a cataloguer, could forbear to flick through Castellan's elegant little 12⁰ volumes, if only to look at the neat, and often dramatic, engravings. And the book must have belonged to Byron, a voracious reader.

4. A previous translation by D. Boileau under the title *The Ghost Seer, or Apparitionist*, had appeared in London in 1795, but it is clear from Byron's version of the title that it was Render's version that he read.

5. *Literaturnyje očerki* (Moscow, 1900) (in Russian).

6. Khach'ik Dashtents', *Bayronĕ ev Hayerĕ* (Erevan, 1959), p. 46 (in Armenian).

7. "P'aghank'shank'i ev siro nshan ē hayeri beranum."

8. Dashtents', *Bayronĕ ev Hayerĕ*, p. 41.

9. This letter was shown to me by Father Sahak, head of the Seminary at San Lazzaro, during the Armenian-Iranian conference held at Venice in 1978.

10. One gladly forgives the Abbot for this error, for it is doubtless the natural modesty of the Cambridge man that is responsible for his Academy being less known abroad than in England.

11. *Byron in Italy* (London, 1941), p. 71. It was another Balliol man, Professor Oliphant, who in his otherwise admirable book *Latin and Greek* dismissed the study of Russian (ergo Pushkin, Dostoevski, Essenin, etc., etc.) as "banausic." Byron, who did not neglect the Classics, would have had more sympathy with Dr. Johnson's exhortation, "Let Mankind, with extensive view / Survey the world from China to Peru." Dr. Johnson was a Pembroke man.

12. Included by Thomas Moore in *Lord Byron's Life, Letters and Journals*, (London, 1830), pp. 125-127. It was later printed by the Mekhitarists in *Lord Byron's Armenian Exercizes and Poetry* (Venice, 1870), pp. 4-10, bearing the date January 2, 1817, the date of his letter to Murray, quoted on p. 12.

13. The Father neatly inscribed his name in its Armenian form on his and Byron's list of the characters of the Armenian alphabet in the possession of John Murray, Ltd., on the same sheet on which Byron wrote his own name in Greek. *Paschal* is not an exact rendering of *Harut'iwn* (Classical *Yarut'iwn* "Resurrection"), for which *Anastase* would be more correct. *Paschal* is rather Arm. *Zatik* "Easter" (from an Iranian root meaning

"birth," cf. NP *zâd*, in the Christian sense of "rebirth"). *Zatik*, in its Modern Western pronunciation *Zadig*, has entered Western literature with Voltaire's "conte oriental" so entitled, though without any Armenian content. Voltaire probably met the name through the Armenian "Pascal" who by virtue of his contacts with Turkey opened the first café in Paris toward the end of the seventeenth century, in good time for Voltaire (b. 1694), a known habitué of the coffeehouse, e.g., Le Procope.

14. French *é* would have been more probable, though Byron's description would by accident fit the prehistorical value, since Arm. *ē* derives mainly from I.E. *ey*.

15. *Lord Byron's Life*, pp. 224-225.

16. Dashtents', *Bayronĕ ev Hayerĕ*, p. 95.

17. *Lord Byron's Life*, pp. 336-337.

18. Lady Blessington, *Conversations of Lord Byron*, E. J. Lovell, ed. (Princeton, N.J., 1969), p. 75.

19. See above, n. 12.

20. Milan, 1621.

21. The text is printed in the Venice Bible of 1805, Appendix, pp. 25-27, which Byron probably had before him.

22. *Lord Byron's Life*, vol. III, pp. 612-617.

23. Ibid. vol. II, p. 328.

24. Introduction to *Letters of Lord Byron*, R.G. Howarth, ed. (London, 1971 reprint), p. viii.

25. Dashtents', p. 85.

26. *Byron*, H. Miles, trans. (London, 1930), p. 299.

27. "Lord Bayrĕn," *Bazmavēp*, (Venice, 1932), p. 268.

28. I venture to say this by virtue of my experience as a Protestant student at the Institut Catholique, Paris, where it was clearly the custom to teach by example rather than precept. On a visit to San Lazzaro, however, the humorous Father Mesrob Djanashian did say, "If you are a Protestant, then protest!" but did not wait for an answer.

29. Published facsimiles of Venice Armenian manuscripts in my library do not enable me to point to an actual San Lazzaro example, but a similar scene is represented on fol. 162v. of Chester Beatty MS 558 of the thirteenth century; see S. Der Nersessian. *The Chester Beatty Library: A Catalogue of the Armenian Manuscripts* (Dublin, 1958), vol. II, plate 16, where owing to an editorial oversight the evangelist is identified as St. Luke.

30. *Amaranots' Biwzandean i neghuts'in Kostandnupolsoy koch'ets'eal i Tachkats' Poghaz Ich'i* (Venice: San Lazzaro, 1794).

31. *Storagrut'iwn Hin Hayastaneayts', Mets Hayk'* (Venice: San Lazzaro, 1822).

32. Step'anos Agonts' and Ghukas Inchichian, *Ashkharhagrut'iwn ch'orits' masants' ashkharhi* (Venice: San Lazzaro, 1802-1806). Inchichian is the author of Part II, Europe, vols. 5 and 6 (1804), and Part I, Asia, vol. 1 (1806); see S. A. Shtikyan, *Hay nor grakanut'yan zhamanakagrut'yun (1801-1850)* (Erevan: Academy of Sciences of the Armenian S.S.R., 1973), p. 61.

33. *Indogermanische Forschungen*, Band XVI (Strassburg, 1904; reprinted Amsterdam: Oriental Press, 1969), pp. 197-490.

34. In this version of the original text, the normal abbreviations have been restored to their full form, and the device, a superscript⁰, by which the poet indicated that no ը (ĕ) is to be read, for metrical reasons, in the given consonantal cluster, is ignored, as is also the unnecessary ւ (*hiwn*) above ու (*ow*) to show that it is to be pronounced as a consonant (*v*). The phonetic mistake in the fourth line of the second stanza, in which *zĕsteghtsuats* should read *ĕsteghtsuats*, has been left.

35. Villari, Eng. trans., in *Oxford English Dictionary.*

36. One must point out that, apart from the fact that a word does not "rhyme" with itself, *i tsovin* is a grammatical error, since *tsov* "sea" is a *u*-stem: *i tsovun* is correct, though it would not rhyme with the monorhyme in *-in* chosen by the poet.

37. When this "etymology" was challenged by a reviewer, Borrow claimed that it was a deliberate error, to keep reviewers on their toes. He may have been thinking of Armenian *kov*, English *cow*.

38. Orberian, *Lord Bayrĕn,* pp. 266-267 (in Armenian).